



Photos by BILL WECHTER / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Chef Larry Banares, left, with San Diego County Chief Administrative Officer Walt Ekard, tapes an episode of 'The County Cooks! With Chef Larry' at Guajome Regional Park in Oceanside — before the rains came. Below, marinated ingredients await combination for the segment on flank steak.

Cooking for the County

**'Chef Larry' weathers the rain
for the sake of television**



STORY BY CYNDIE CLAYPOOL DE NEVE ■ Staff Writer

The weather is not a fan of the cable TV show "The County Cooks! With Chef Larry."

Or maybe the rain really is a fan — so much so that it has come out for each of the eight tapings of the show starring Chef Larry Banares of San Diego, which airs at 7:30 nightly on the local government access channel County Television Network.

At 11 a.m. on a recent April morning, Banares — who has won three gold medals as part of the USA Culinary Team, among other honors — was shooting his June show on grilling at Oceanside's Guajome Regional Park, known for its peaceful lake, friendly ducks and 1850s-era adobe ranch house.

With the lake as the backdrop, the set was a 2-foot-by-5-foot charcoal grill and a long table deco-

rated with a green cloth and floral arrangements by Island Blossoms International of Carmel Mountain Ranch. Three cameras, one focused on the grill, one on the table and one on the chef, were ready for action. Electrical cords snaked from a power shed over the grass and around the picnic tables.

The taping had been slated for March, but an unexpected storm had forced postponement. On this morning, the sun was starting to peek out from behind gray clouds. The show's director/editor, Dominic Fulgoni, optimistically told the three cameramen, "Remember to correct if the sun does come out."

Unfortunately, that never happened.

Just before shooting started, the green

tablecloth began blowing slightly in the wind.

As Banares and his co-host for the day — Walt Ekard, San Diego County chief administrative officer — zipped through the first segment on marinating and grilling flank steak, the weather played its first trick.

"What's this leaf?" asked Ekard, picking up a small green herb found in the premade marinade. Unfortunately, it wasn't in the marinade they had just assembled on camera.

"Let's cut," said the chef. "You know why? The bay leaf blew out."

They started again from Walt's impromptu question, but this time Chef Larry was ready. He replied that it's a good idea to always double-check the recipe at

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Chef weathers the storm for the sake of television

www.ctn.org.

Holly Richardson, media specialist for the county, smiled at the plug. After all, the point of the cooking show is to bring attention to CTN, the Web site and what the county has to offer.

"Some people ask why the county does a cooking show," Richardson said. "It gives us the opportunity to feature county facilities and county parks. And we have five-minute feature packages filmed throughout the county. It's an entertaining way to show local businesses and local people."

It costs \$1,200 per episode, and the same show airs nightly for an entire month. "We're not like normal TV," said Richardson. "We want people to have the opportunity to tune in and tell their friends they saw it on CTN."

"Chef Larry does classes (at Williams-Sonoma stores), and people come up and say they watched the show three times — first for the entertainment value, second to get the recipe and third to watch his technique."

Banares also does cooking segments twice weekly on television's Channel 10 and for the radio station KPOP-AM 1360. As he sliced the apple for his Crunchy Summer Slaw, he maintained a pleasant mix of banter and cooking explanations until he was supposed to introduce the feature by Rene Quaresma, which had yet to be filmed.

"It took about 10 takes to do the intro to Rene's segment," Fulgoni said later, "probably because he didn't know what the segment was going to be."

It also didn't help that Banares occasionally referred to the TV audience as radio "listeners" instead of TV "viewers."

After several fumbles, Fulgoni suggested the open-ended segue, "Renee has a story about why grilling is so popular in San Diego."

Banares smiled. "You get a bay leaf for that," he told Fulgoni.

Filming the first half of the 30-minute show took about an hour. By then, the sun had been hidden behind clouds. The crew of seven started bundling up in jackets

and sweaters.

For continuity on film, however, Ekard and Banares remained in their short-sleeved shirts and aprons. Ekard crossed his arms and shivered as he waited for chef's assistant Eddie Mitchell to bring out the ingredients for the next two recipes: Sirloin Burgers With Roquefort Cheese, and Chef Larry's Sundried Tomato Aioli.

As Mitchell double-checked the prepared ingredients against the recipe, the wind fluttered the tablecloth.

"I think we've relocated to the arctic," the chef joked.

They started the next segment. Banares began, "That was a great story, Rene — about what I don't know."

The crew laughed. Some ducks honked loudly.

Between takes, Ekard, who was vacationing with his teen-age children at Carlsbad State Beach, tasted the Crunchy Summer Slaw they had made after doing the steak. "Oh, that's great! Is this recipe already on the Web site?"

"You'll have to wait," teased Fulgoni.

The storm continued to brew. Fulgoni wasn't stopping for anything else.

As Banares explained on camera how to make burgers with Roquefort cheese filling, another duck honked loudly. Despite the winged scene-stealer, the segment finished without a hitch. All that was left was for Banares to dress the burger and say goodbye. But with the cold wind picking up, the two burgers weren't cooking.

Banares and Mitchell added charcoal to the grill. Then they covered the burgers with an empty stainless-steel food container to speed the cooking.

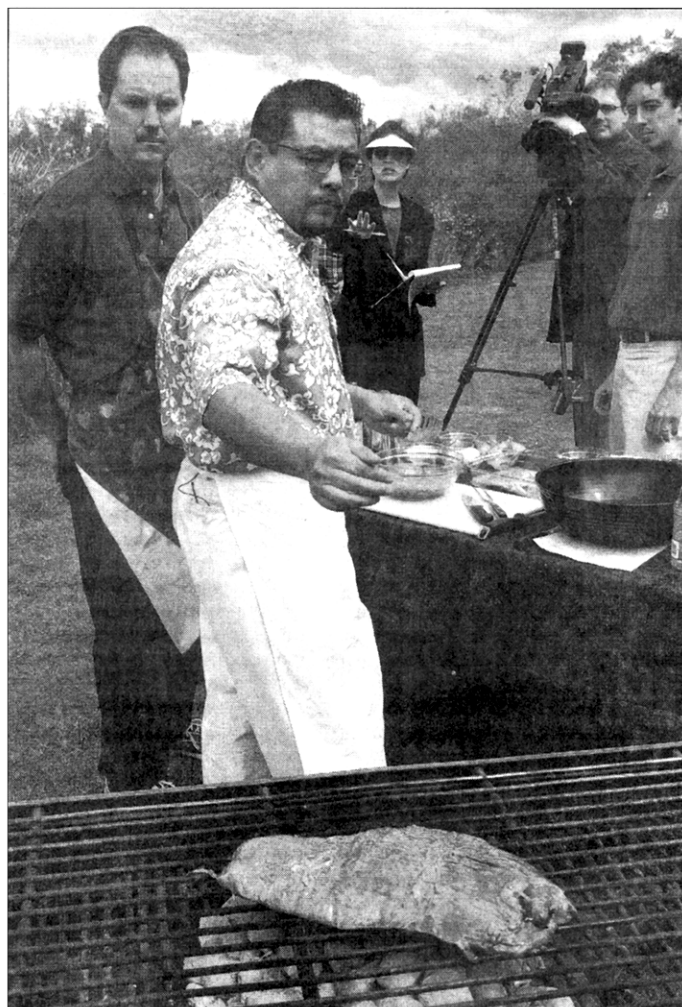
Still, the meat wasn't done. The director put on his sweater as a few sprinkles landed on noses, cheeks, jackets — and the cameras. The crew protected the cameras with plastic bags and a jacket. The flowers on Banares' table blew over.

"And people think government jobs are boring," said a good-humored Richardson as she ducked under an umbrella.

Fulgoni suggested Banares say they're taking the burgers off early, because of "June gloom."

The sun reflectors came in handy after all: Staffers held them over each camera as the shoot finished.

Dark clouds rolled in as Banares showed Ekard how to spread the aioli and dress the burger. Traci McGrath, who co-produces the show with Banares,



BILL WECHTER / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Chef Larry Banares, center, carries on with his Grilled Flank Steak segment at Guajome Regional Park despite bad weather. Walt Ekard, at left, chief administrative officer for San Diego County, was his guest on the show. Though rain came soon after, the segment was salvaged.

gave the wrap-it-up sign.

"I think we're going to grab our burgers and run inside to enjoy them," Banares said.

At last they were done — or so they thought. But the battery on Ekard's microphone had died. For 10 minutes, people searched pagers and phones and cars for a AA battery.

"It's raining now. Maybe Walt can just smile and nod," said McGrath, adding to Banares, "and mention that it's raining."

When the taping finished, the now-drenched crew cheered. But the director wasn't done. "One more time and actually take off."

Banares repeated the line, "... and run inside to enjoy them." This time he and Ekard picked up the plate with the finished burger and ran "inside" — but there's no "inside" near the lake. The hosts took cover under the back awning of an open van.

Kent Doetkott, the show's engineer, turned serious: "Get these

cameras out of here! NOW!"

Within five minutes, there was hardly a trace of camera, cords or food — except one lone burger left on the grill, now soaked by the rain.

Banares, who has worked at such places as the Disneyland Hotel, Queen Mary and the Town and Country Resort/Convention Center, sat in the van, cutting the one finished hamburger into six wedges.

He smiled. "It was fun. It's like working in a hotel: Expect the unexpected."

"The County Cooks! With Chef Larry" airs on the County Television Network daily at 7:30 p.m. The grilling episode will run in June. On Daniels Cablevision, CTN is on Channels 51 and 66. For Time-Warner, it's Channel 22. On Cox, CTN airs periodically on Channel 17, but it may be pre-empted by city cable shows. Chef Larry Banares offers recipes and information on the Web site www.ctn.org.